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THE CHURCH AND THE CITY COMMUNITY

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If the church has no program for the city community, church extinction—not church extension—is the duty of the day. The city communities are so extending themselves over the map of this nation that every county of the continental United States having a city of 25,000, with the exception of two, has increased its population in the last ten years, and city communities of 25,000 and over have absorbed, since 1900, 55.01 per cent of the growth of the nation. Of every 10,000 persons in the continental United States 2,594 lived in cities of 25,000 and over in 1900; in 1910 the figures had risen to 3,099 of every 10,000. In 1900, 7,406 of every 10,000 lived outside the cities of this group, and in 1910 only 6,901. The cities, through their universities, through their press, and, above all, through the concentration within them of the industrial problems incident to the shifting of the stress of economic equities from fields to factories—the cities, through these and other factors, are the gauge and guide of civilization. If the church is not essential to banish their barbarities and to produce an urban brotherhood—humane, urbane, and yet as dynamic as the “Mauretania’s” turbines—the church should strike its flag, and yield to capture by charity organization, civic federation, labor federation, or some other “denomination” which will furnish the nation with a better ration. The capital invested in the churches will no more save them from extinction, if they are not socially serviceable to the coming generations, than the capital invested in ships with double-expansion engines availed to save them from towage to the Erie Basin as hulks unsuited to carry the heavier yet swifter-moving cargoes of the international commerce of our time. The church, to adapt Wordsworth’s description of immanent Deity, must become

A Motion and a Spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

The church, which has been bringing immortality to light, must, like its Founder, bring life, as well, to light. It must transform itself from "an ark of refuge" into a battleship and merchantman of progress.

The church, which is daring in our day to translate its celestial message into the tongue of every tribe upon the planet, is evidently seized with a sense of its catholicity. It is endeavoring to make

the bonds of brotherhood outspread
Beyond the confines of old ethnic dread.

It is summoning Pekin to believe what neither Rome, London, nor New York has yet obeyed. Has it any warrant to tell Tokio that "a God has mingled with the game" of pushing the earth to "reach its heavenly best," if hell, to use an oft-quoted description, is a city "much like London"? The capital of the country where the church originated was exceeded in population by fifty of the cities of the United States; its houses were low and flat-roofed; many, if not most, of its families lived in one room; it took care of its garbage in an outdoor Gehenna so slow in its cremation that, though the fire was not quenched, the worm did not die. Has the church, which originated amid such city conditions, an essential message and a transforming mission for the cities of our time?

To state the question in this way is perhaps to invite the answer "No" from the fair critic of this paper. Nevertheless my own answer is "Yes."

Christianity originated in an urban community; gained, within a generation, adherents in city after city, and, both from tenement and palace, even in the empire's capital; and gave to the world a vision it will not willingly let die, the vision of a city of wholeness (a holy city) let down from heaven to displace the cities of disease, despair, and swollen death-rate of today.

The vision of the Revelation of St. John the Divine to the seven churches in seven cities of Asia is not indeed couched in

scientific, sociological language, but the whole book, which has been "the favorite stamping-ground of fanatical interpreters of Scripture," is coming to be regarded as "the consolation of martyrdom," a prophecy of that perfected association of men on earth which morbid mediaeval hymnology postpones post-mortem and removes beyond the revolution of the earth and beyond the evolution of its society. Those were days when Christians who succeeded in keeping their heads on their shoulders had difficulty in keeping hope in their hearts, and the book, cryptic in its reference to the persecutions of the Roman power, is plain in its prediction of the coming of a city controlled by a religious concept of life, a New Jerusalem, a city of pity, purity, and perfection. It is a city, to translate some of its descriptions into modern terms, with low morbidity, where pain has passed away; a city whose death-rate is lowered to a minimum; a city without crimes of violence and fraud; a city of ravishing beauty within and without; a city of wealth and gladness; a city of gleaming cleanliness, with a crystal and unfailing water supply, and marvelous park and great residential space, but a city withal most highly characterized by its spiritual distinction—its blue-blood citizens whose foreheads proclaim them sons of God, and whose primary occupation is to fulfil the purposes of him who held in his compassion the whole of the human race.

That was the vision splendid by which Christianity in the days of its persecution was on its way attended, yet it is plain that some of its descriptions are symbolisms unless we are willing to think that the race of the future will live in skyscrapers far excelling the height of the towers of commerce of today. Without symbolism one can understand a description of a city whose "length and breadth" are equal, but one whose "length and breadth and height are equal" can only be regarded as in symbolic contrast to the pent-up meagerness of the insulae, or tenement houses, of Rome, and the narrow and tortuous streets of Jerusalem.

The first century hung a city plan on the wall of every

Christian's imagination, and impeached with imperfection every city of the time.

What was the source of this splendid vision?

I for one believe that it came direct from the campaigning method of the public ministry of the Man of Nazareth. His main labors were in Galilee, which was as urban in his day as Rhode Island is today. The whole of Palestine would not reach from New York to Boston and its average width was only fifty miles, yet Josephus, who is not always statistically accurate, says that Galilee had 250 cities of 15,000 each, and Sir William Ramsay, whose services to archaeology won for him his baronetcy, says that from a mountain top Galilee must have looked like one continuous city. It is evident from the record of the life of Jesus of Nazareth that he lived and labored not among rural communities but in city communities. He said of himself that he must hurry on to preach his gospel to "other cities." He sent thirty-five committees of two to announce the gospel of the Kingdom to the cities of Israel and bade them lose no time at their tasks, which apparently occupied six weeks, and yet he said that they would not have entered all the cities of Israel before another stage of his career and campaign was reached. He evidently felt that he had a message for communities as well as for individuals, for he impeached Chorazin and Bethsaida for going on in their old ways. He called his followers to engage in communal service, the extension of a Kingdom of God; and yet he individualized the community, as when he sorrowed over Jerusalem. He went up to the mountain to pray, and he was free there from the intrusion of the crowd, and yet, if Ramsay is right, he may have gone to the mountain top to get the vision of the crowd—all Galilee lying at the mountain foot like one continuous city. He believed that the Spirit of God would come to his followers, after he was withdrawn from their sight, in the city, even in the city in which he suffered, and there they waited, and there, according to the narrative, men from all parts of the earth received the message which the twentieth century is translating into all tongues of the earth. One of his followers, St. Paul, has compelled the

literature of the world to record the impregnable belief of early Christianity in the conquest of cities by Christian principles, for the letters to the Ephesians, Corinthians, Romans, and all the rest are witnesses to the belief of the early Christians in the superiority of their message to any obstacles of wickedness or power. There was one fatuity in the belief of all these men, and St. Paul himself was not free from it, namely, that a single generation would bring the full fruition of Christianity. Social workers, even of our own day, have wrongly anticipated a similar quick success, and since 1859 there is less excuse for expectations of revolutionary reform. But if disciples and apostles made this mistake it was not made by the Man of Nazareth, who both taught that his gospel, like yeast in meal, would ultimately permeate every conviction and custom of humanity, but predicted also that his gospel was to be taught to all nations, growing like a mustard tree; and whose working philosophy, therefore, expects no city to be thoroughly Christian till every city is thoroughly Christian, and expects therefore that the church will both export its beliefs and impart its principles.

He is a superficial student of Christianity who will charge Christianity with failure because it cannot present in 1915 or in 1945 a perfected city. Christianity has a bigger job than that on its hands, a perfected race, and it has been big enough and wise enough from the beginning to have the evolution of all humankind on its program.

The church has been commissioned by its Founder not only to teach men to believe the things which he revealed, especially the fatherhood of God and the certainty of a life beyond, but to teach the nations to obey the principles which he enunciated. The church in the city community has, therefore, not only a theological teaching function, but also a sociological teaching function, and even a sociological action program. The distinguished and earnest apostle of the new nationalism is fond of claiming that his ideals are derived from and in accord with the ideals of Abraham Lincoln, but the Springfield episode of Mr. Lincoln's disappointment with the

clergy of that place shows that his social principles stretch backward beyond the first president of the nation to the only founder within my knowledge of a religion which, from the first, has had a perfected internationalism as its goal.

Lincoln drew from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth his antipathy to slavery. He believed that a house divided against itself could not stand, and that therefore a nation half free and half slave could not endure. Lincoln had imagination enough, moreover, to see that if the Golden Rule is not an emancipation act, it is a manumission act for every slave-holding Christian, and the need of the church in the city community today is the study not of its catechisms but of the social ideals of its Founder, and the social needs of every section and class of the community. If, as one of America's most distinguished teachers of sociology has said, "the scientific study of sociology reveals the essential sanity and permanence of the Christian, or humanitarian, concept of society" (I quote from memory), the Gospels and the Prophets have a modernity about them which fit them to be a textbook for the social workers of the time, while the scientific, sociological study is equally necessary to prevent the limitation of the interpretation of their teachings by the conditions of some other time or of any neighborhood of our own time. Tolstoy is to be forever praised for his insistence on the permanent value of the words of Jesus; but he is to be forever blamed for his heretical, that is to say, his voluntary emphasis on parts of them to the exclusion of the whole. Professor Peabody, Shailer Mathews, and Canon Fremantle are fully as loyal and infinitely more logical. John Ruskin was a teacher of righteousness, but equally a pleader for reaction, and the interpretation of the gospels must be geared to that dynamics of society in which the Master both exceeded the men of his time and these followers of a later time.

If the church in the city community, where men live in close association, will address itself to such a study of the purposes of Jesus its seminaries, hitherto called theological, will deserve the name sociological seminaries equally well, and they will teach, not only what man is to believe concerning God,

but what duties God requires of man. The 107 questions of the Presbyterian Shorter Catechism, from which I have quoted the preceding phrase, will then, perhaps, have an appendix of 701 questions which will actually deal with the duties God requires of man, for, while my memory of the Shorter Catechism, despite deliberate neglect, is fairly complete to this day, I cannot remember within it any detailed development of the biblical doctrine of such duties.

Yet the doctrine of such duties is there, and abundantly there, and while it is applicable to the function of the church in rural communities, it is more insistently applicable to the church in the city community.

The child in the country, for example, has abundant play space, and sometimes too few companions. The child in the city, on the contrary, has too many companions, and too little play space. Would a study of the teaching of Jesus lead the church in the city community to take an interest in the play problem of the children as a religious duty? The writer would unhesitatingly answer yes. He would recall the observance by Jesus of the wedding and funeral games in the market-place—the biggest space in a Galilean town; and his refusal to silence the gladness of the children of the temple; and he would specifically apply the words of Jesus, “It is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones should perish,” to include the lack of play-space, and of play-training as a cause of the perishing of many a child. Here is one of the instances where the church in the city community must not only study the words of Jesus, but study the facts of life to gather their correct interpretation and application. Jane Addams’ recent book and other manuals are a modern “imitation of Christ” in their relation to the problems of child-play.

Nothing can be sadder than the deposit of theological dogma over Christ’s doctrine of the child. The parable of the Ninety and Nine is popularly believed to refer only to the reclamation of prodigal sons or prodigal daughters, whereas, while, in one gospel, it does refer to that, and warrants the work which the church in the city community is doing to reclaim

the down-and-outs, it is a pat illustration which the Man of Nazareth used on two distinct occasions, one of which was his use of it to proclaim the heavenly value of the child-lives which the Roman law of his day allowed the parents to destroy or desecrate. The church in the city community of that time understood him, and obeyed him, and even the skeptical Gibbon was forced to concede that infanticide became a crime in the Roman Empire only after the mild protest of Stoicism had been reinforced by the missionary passion of Christianity. Even in New York State, however, the empire state of America, the community was not abreast of the sentence of St. Paul, "The children are not for the parents, but the parents for the children," till a little more than a generation ago, when the law forfeiting the parental right of a parent endangering the life, limb, or morals of his child was passed.

It is not the will of the heavenly Father "that one of these little ones should perish"; the church in the city community should, therefore, study the tenement as it affects child morbidity and child mortality; the standard of living, in relation to the same ends; child-labor in its ante-natal effects and in various trades and factories; and the education of the city's childhood—mentally, manually, and morally. A field for social service, whose edges only are cultivated as yet, lies open to the church in the city community which will be loyal to the revolutionary teaching of Jesus concerning the child.

I have spoken of Christ's demands for the children first, not because they are more direct than other neglected demands which need attention, but because the pathos of child-life in the tenements of a big city would make the very stones cry out with sympathy; and because the social service of the children of the city must, it seems to me, compel the churches, as well as permit the churches, to work together. The Baptist and the Presbyterian, for example, teach different doctrines of the relation of childhood to the first of the sacraments of the church; theologically they are there at odds; but at the door of the factory, where they are investigating child-labor, there is nothing in their past denominational history to prevent them

from desiring and doing the same thing. Their theological seminaries, hitherto too commonly located in the country, as if Christianity had to do only with the individual, are rapidly becoming sociological seminaries as well, wherein the common wants of all citizens are reviewed in the light of religion. Only as the churches become the church of the city community, in fact, can the Revelation of St. John the Divine become a reality in the cities of the world. Our usual test of city administration, for example, is the tax-rate. If it is low, the tax-payers are urged to continue it, in order to save their money; and too often the church in the city community is silent about the sin of the false economy which, while it lowers the tax-rate of the city, may raise its death-rate, and, while lessening the city tax-rate, may raise the state rate by compelling the state to care for additional prisoners or additional insane. In New York City, in 17 years, I have met only one man who growled at the smallness of his tax-bills. There are many reformers who, like myself, perhaps, are chronically willing to advise the city to spend more money, but who themselves are taxed neither for realty nor for personal property and who have so little hope of ever acquiring any realty that they would like to see all taxes concentrated on land. But this man was different; he was a large tax-payer; and he was chronically sore at heart because the city did not put into its budget sufficient allowances for the education, recreation, and relief of citizens young and old. But a better time is coming. I have before me a sermon entitled "The City Budget and the Day of Pentecost," a combination of thenness and nowness which would have been impossible to the preachers of a generation ago. I do not myself think that the pulpit of the church in the city community should very frequently specifically deal with the economic themes which preachers have not been educated to handle as intelligently as the specialists who will come at their summons, with creditable civic spirit, to give their message as lay preachers and lay teachers on matters of interest to every citizen, and, therefore, appropriate for any gathering in a house of God. But the church which will summon its worshipers to lament over the lack

of room in the Bethlehem inn for the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem and which never exhibits any agony over the basement-born children of New York is a church which will never be visited either by the Spirit of God or regarded with respect by men; and if the pulpit should not, as in my view it should not, become a mere economic forum, the church should, in my judgment, be organized into a Laity League, of both men and women, and subdivided into committees dealing with the common needs of every citizen and committees dealing with the special wants of some citizens, while the pulpit of the church should constantly so teach the value of human life as to make the tax-payer say, not "How much can we save in city administration?" but "Where can we best spend, for the advantage of the community, through other departments, the savings we have effected in departments A and B?" or, to put it more briefly, and concretely, "If the giving of a cup of cold water to a child shall not fail of its reward, what kind of a Christian am I to work and pray for a decreased tax-rate which will impair the joy of 10,000 children?"

Were I today, therefore, the pastor of a city church I would stress in my pulpit work the divine values of human life, and would endeavor to organize my church into committees as follows:

A. Committees dealing with the common needs of every citizen, as follows:

1. Housing
2. Health
3. Education
4. Economic Success
5. Religion
6. Recreation, Art, and Love of Nature
7. Neighborhood Welfare
8. Community Efficiency

B. Committees dealing with the special needs of special citizens, as follows:

1. Childhood
2. Old Age
3. Prisoners

4. Defectives
5. Dependents
6. The strangers within our gates

At this time I cannot develop the detail under each of these headings. Suffice it to say that this is the general outline for the work of Boston—1915 which I submitted to its directors about a year ago, and that its development is proceeding excellently, so far as I can judge at this distance, in the city on the Charles. It is my highest ambition to foster the same departmentation I then thought out in every church of the city community called New York.